



**Comments from Imtac on the consultation about the  
10 Year Review of the Regional Development  
Strategy**

**March 2011**

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## **About Imtac**

- 1 Imtac is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including key transport professionals. Our role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.
- 2 Our aim is to ensure that older people and disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else to travel when and where they want.
- 3 Imtac receives support from the Department for Regional Development.

## **Background comments on the consultation**

- 4 Imtac welcomes the opportunity to comment on the 10 Year Review of the RDS. The Committee views the RDS as a vital component of developing a fairer society and improving the life chances of both older people and disabled people.
- 5 Whilst the focus of Imtac is on transportation issues the Committee recognises that the need to travel is a direct consequence of where we live, where we work or are educated, where we shop and the location of key services and facilities. Future decisions about where we locate these facilities and services will have a major impact on how easy people find it to travel and live independent lives.
- 6 It is not disputed that decisions around planning and development over previous decades have been based around people having access to the private car. Easy access to a car has brought huge benefits to many in society broadening choice in many aspects of people's lives. However the consequence of this approach means that the car is essential to access most everyday services and activities.
- 7 Over recent decades we have come to understand the full impact of a society where access to a car is essential. Many people in

society do not have access to a car and research<sup>1</sup> has shown that this has a major impact on their life chances and contributes directly to social exclusion of individuals and both urban and rural communities.

- 8 Statistics show that disabled people are less likely to have access to a car and that car ownership decreases as people get older. Given this it is hardly surprising that disabled people and older people are amongst the people in society who find doing everyday things most difficult.

### **Comments on the revised RDS**

- 9 From the perspective of Imtac any revised RDS must seek to highlight how future sustainable development can reduce social exclusion. The Committee does not believe that as currently drafted the revised RDS achieves this and we would make the following recommendations:

- The Department revisit the analysis contained in Chapter 2 providing stronger analysis of the linkage between social exclusion and spatial and long-term development
- The Department includes reducing social exclusion on the list of significant factors on page 32
- Based on the revised analysis of Chapter 2 the Department add reducing social exclusion for both individuals and communities to the Vision and Aims of the revised RDS
- Based on the revised analysis of Chapter 2 ensure that both Chapters 4 and 5 of the revised RDS acknowledge that accessibility issues pose significant difficulties for both individuals and communities in both urban and rural areas
- Ensure that Strategic Guidance (Chapter 5) contains specific guidance around addressing accessibility issues for both individuals and communities living in both urban and rural areas

- 10 Imtac does not intend to comment in detail on any of the other proposals contained in the revised RDS. The Committee believe

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<sup>1</sup> For the best analysis see “Making the connections: Final Report on Transport and Social Exclusion” Social Exclusion Unit 2003.

they have merit but we feel that unless they are underpinned by a commitment to reducing social exclusion and tackling the accessibility problems created by decades of promoting car use the RDS will continue to reinforce inequality in our society.

- 11 Imtac does not underestimate the challenges involved in tackling the issues we have raised. Social exclusion is a complex issue as are the potential solutions. However it is vital that major strategic documents such as the RDS develop an informed approach to the issue and influence the development of other strategies, policies and services.
- 12 The Committee does not propose to comment in detail on the EQIA associated with the revised RDS. Given we believe there are major gaps in the RDS itself in relation to equality and inclusion we do not believe there is enough evidence to prove whether there a positive impacts in relation to Section 75 Groupings. Take for example the assumption in the EQIA that increased employment opportunities will benefit disabled people. This will only be the case if steps are taken to ensure that those opportunities are accessible to disabled people. The revised RDS does not make clear how it proposes to address the specific accessibility requirements of individuals and communities currently affected by social exclusion other than people living in rural areas.

## **Conclusion**

- 13 Imtac would like to thank the Department for the opportunity to respond to the current consultation. The Committee has raised some fundamental issues in relation to the revised RDS and we would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these with officials in more detail at the earliest opportunity.

## Contact us

- 14 Please contact Michael Lorimer if you have any queries about this paper, would like it in another format or language or would like to help us implement any of the actions. Michael can be contacted at:

Imtac  
Enterprise House  
55-59 Adelaide Street  
Belfast BT2 8FE

Telephone: 028 9072 6020  
Textphone: 028 9072 6016  
Fax: 028 9024 5500  
Email: [info@imtac.org.uk](mailto:info@imtac.org.uk)

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